

A STUDY BOOK FOR FIRST COMMUNICANTS



Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan

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ܘܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܚܐ ܘܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܚܐ

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

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**Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma
Metropolitan**

Translated by
Elizabeth Koshy



**CHRISTAVA SAHITYA SAMITHI
TIRUVALLA**

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Introduction

Some of our priests conduct preparation classes for those who receive Holy Communion for the first time. They are given all information about the Church and are taught and that they must know about our teachings. Many have complained that there is no official text that can be used for these classes. Till such a book is made ready, this book can be used. This book first published in 1965 has been revised in accordance with the suggestions of those who have made use of the first edition. A new chapter on the Nicene Creed and an order of preparation for the communicants are also included.

Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Foreword

It is His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Marthoma who taught us the significance of God-experiences and blessings we attain through sacraments. Thirumeni emphasized the western thinking that sacraments are the means of receiving Jesus Christ, the gift of God, whether we be worthy or unworthy. He makes it clear that the foundation of the Church is Christ and that sacraments are centred on Christ. It is a principle of the Eastern Churches that confirmation that is the seal of the Holy Spirit follows baptism. In the Western Churches the candidates enter confirmation later with the bishop's laying hands.

Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana give the same emphasis and impart the same strengthening. They are sacraments that express unity and oneness with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through them we enter the experience of new life. Though there is no obstacle on the way of those confirmed in faith to enter Holy Communion, our Church wishes as St. Paul says that we must do so only after a self-examination. This book of Juhanon Thirumeni are for those who come for Holy Communion for the first time. This book helps in preparing them with the word and sacraments and also in their relationship with society as well as all creation.

It is a wonder that Thirumeni has included in this small book all that a member of the Mar Thoma Church must know, relating it to knowledge about the Church as

A Study Book for First Communicants

well as establishing it on the foundation of the Bible. It is a book that helps not only the youngsters and the adults of our Church, but also of those of other Churches. This book is a blessing to everybody. I wish and pray that this handbook be useful to the priests who are the leaders in the ministry of redemption and faith community who participate in it.

Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas

THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH

According to tradition it is St. Thomas who established a Church in Malankara. It cannot be said that it has enough historical evidence. That it is St. Peter who founded the Church in Rome, has also no satisfactory historical evidence. (There are those who question the historical evidence of Christ's birth and death) Yet is a strong traditional belief that St. Thomas landed in (Crangannore) Kodungallore in A.D. 52 and baptized many members of the high-castes and made them join the Church. Even as historical knowledge keeps increasing the traditional belief about the visit of St. Thomas is becoming stronger. Wrong traditions will be rejected when historical evidence is on the rise.

There is no exact and definite information about the Malankara Church of the first four centuries after it was established by St. Thomas. It is believed that St. Thomas was killed in a place called St. Thomas Mount near Madras and was buried in Mylapore.

The Malankara Church and its Association with the Nestorian Church

The indisputable document about the Malankara Church came from the diary of a traveller called Cosmo Indicopolestes (522 A.D.). Indicopolestes has recorded in his diary that he saw a strong church with bishops from Persia in Ceylon and in Malabar, the land in which

pepper grows. This document comes from the 6th century. The Nestorian Church was the Church of the Middle East. The Nestorian Church named after its founder Nestorius held the doctrine that in our Lord Jesus Christ there were two separate nature, one human and one divine and that he was of a dual nature. The Synod of Ephesus (A.D. 431) rejected it as heresy. The Orthodox or Catholic faith is that the human and the divine combined in Jesus without blending into one, while remaining without a dual personality. As Nestorius and his followers had no place in the Roman Empire they went to the Middle East and established a Church there. Once upon a time the Nestorian Church sent missionaries to countries like China, Ceylon and India. There are historians who maintain that it was the Nestorian Church and not St. Thomas who established the Malankara Church in the 5th century. However, there is no doubt that the Malankara Church was in association with the Church of the Middle East during the period between the 6th and the 16th centuries. Historians admit that the Archdeacons conducted the internal rule of the Church though bishops came from abroad for supervision and ordination. There are no historical documents that give detailed information about the Malankara Church of these ten centuries. During this period some families from Syria migrated to Malankara and settled down here. Some granite-crosses in Kottayam Valiyapally are indicative of the Middle-East connection. The Malankara Syrian Christians were great archers and tradesmen. There is a legend that there was a royal family called Villarvattom, among the Syrian Christians. In the Middle Ages clergymen and bishops from the Roman Church visited Malankara. The most important among them are Marco Polo, John of Monte, Carbino, Friar Jordanus and John de Marignoli. There are some who try to main on the basis of these visits that the Malankara Church was under the Pope at that time itself. But this argument cannot be accepted at all. The association at that time was not with the Nestorians, there was a current view that the association was with the “Catholicose of all East” in the Middle East. The situation is that there are not enough documents about the teachings as well as about the Taksa (an authoritative book of prayers

followed during the Holy Communion). From the decisions of the Udayamperoor Synod called forth by Alexis De Menezes we get some evidence about the teachings of the Malankara Church. From them come to arrive at the following facts.

1. Neither the authority of the Pope nor his teaching about transubstantiation was accepted.
2. There was no worship of the idols; there was no Qurbána for the dead. There was no intercession to Virgin Mary at the end of the Lord's Prayer.
3. No holy oil was used during the time of baptism.
4. There was no instruction as to the celibacy of the clergy. There was also no instruction about the private confession to priests.
5. Bread and wine were served separately. Inter-Church communion was permitted.
6. The basis for teachings must be the Holy Bible.

The Malankara Church and its Association with the Roman Church

Vasco De Gama landed at Kozhikode (Calicut) in 1498 and entered into trade relationship with the Zamarin. Thereafter Portuguese domination prevailed over India for one hundred and fifty years. The Portuguese were eager to bring the Malankara Church under Papal Supremacy. Francis Xavier arrived in Goa in 1542. He converted numerous people from the fisher-community living on the sea-shore. Since all the ships were under the control of the Portuguese, it was difficult for bishops from other Churches to come here. They set up a Theological Seminary and began to teach Roman Theology. An Arch Bishop called Alexis De Menezes summoned a Synod in Udayamperoor (Diamper) in 1599 and brought the Malankara Church under the authority of the Pope. Thus the Malankara Church ended its Nestorian associations and became a part of the Roman Church.

The Arrival of the Dutch and the Oath of Coonen Cross

The Jesuit Order was appointed to implement the decisions of the Udayamperoor Synod. The defects in their policy made many people

draw away and those in Malankara sent requests for non-Roman bishops from abroad to be sent here. Provoked by the news of the drawing of a bishop called Ahathulla, by the Portuguese, twenty thousand people went to Cochin to fight against them. They withdrew at the sight of the big guns of the Portuguese and Cochin government. But they gathered around the granite cross at Mattanchery maidan and holding on to the ropes tied around the cross pledged that they were giving up the Roman connection forever and this is known as the 'Oath of the Coonen Cross' (1653). But the majority remained loyal to the Roman Church because of the Roman activities and the difficulty in getting bishops from abroad. Eighty four parishes remained loyal to the Roman Church while thirty-two parishes stood firm in their opposition to it.

The Jacobite Connection

These thirty-two parishes, unable to get bishops from abroad, installed Archdeacon Thomas as Marthoma I, with the laying of hands of twelve priests. He ruled for about twelve years. Gradually the Portuguese grew weak and the Dutch came to power in South India in 1663. The Dutch were Protestants. The obstacle to the coming of the Bishops by sea was gone. In 1665 Mar Gregorious who was sent by the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch consecrated Marthoma I as per the valid order. Thus the problems of the invalidity of laying hands' (kaiveyppu) was solved. This was how the Malankara Church began its association with the Patriarch. Thus there were two churches in the Malankara. The majority of the parishes which remained within the Roman Catholic Church came to be known as old loyalists and those who returned to the old freedom were known as new loyalists.

During this period the bishops who came from abroad and the native bishops ruled the Malankara Church. The new bishops were consecrated sometimes by the bishops from abroad and sometimes by these native bishops.

This period of Jacobite connection was from 1665-1843. Nine bishops known as Marthoma and four bishops known as Dionysius have ruled the Malankara Church.

The Coming of the Protestant Missionaries

From 1665 to 1843 Malankara had two Churches here – the Roman Catholic Church and the Jacobite Syrian Church. This period was not one of social or spiritual growth for the Malankara Christians. It may even be said that it was a period of decline and degradation. At the beginning of the 19th century the princely states of Travancore and Cochin sought the help of the British to escape from the attack of Tippu and ultimately they became tribute (tax) paying states to the British. Resident rulers were appointed to exert the foreign control on them. Colonel Munro, the second British resident, seeing the deplorable state of the Christians here requested the Church Missionary Society to send missionaries for their uplift and awakening. In response to this request these missionaries – Norton, Baker, Fen and Baily came here and started their work. Colonel Munro worked a lot for the uplift of the Christians. During this period the Syrian Church got Munro Island, Old Seminary and “Vattippanam”(trust fund), an amount of money got as interest. Punnathra Mar Dionysius, who was then, the bishop of Malankara sincerely co-operated with the missionaries, who had the permission to visit the parishes. In 1833 some of the missionaries returned and new ones arrived. Cheppad Mar Dionysius was the bishop of this period and there arose some disagreement between him and the missionaries. There was also some attempt to alienate them by telling each group, stories about the other. People did not like the missionaries’ control on their freedom in ordaining as many priests as they wanted, and also on keeping the accounts and other records. The missionaries had also a tendency to turn people to the Anglican style. The bishop convened a meeting of his people in Mavelikara. The decisions taken there are known as “Mavelikara Synod”. Here it was declared that the churches and properties in Malankara belonged to the Patriarch of Antioch and that the missionaries had no right to interfere with the Church affairs.

This difference of opinion did not move to a court case. In accordance with a panchayath decision, the Old Seminary and the ‘Vattippanam’ (trust fund) were to be the bishop’s and the Munro

island and the education fund were to be the missionaries' In 1836 a faction that left the Syrian Church began to function as a part of the Anglican Church.

The missionaries began to work among the backward classes whom the Syrian Church did not pay any attention to. Some Syrian families in Kottayam, Mallappally and Mavelikara supported the missionaries and became members of the Anglican Church.

The Independent Syrian Church of Anjoor

At the end of the 18th century, the foreign bishop Mar Gregorios ordained his friend Rev. Kattumangat as Ramban. Later he was consecrated as bishop without the knowledge and consent of the Malankara Church members. Though bishop Kattumangat got the right consecration, as a bishop, he had no parishes to rule as he was not elected and accepted by the people. Therefore after the death of Mar Gregorios, bishop Kattumangat with what wealth he had, left the borders of Travancore and Cochin and formed a diocese in British Malabar. This is the beginning of the Thozhiyoor Independent Syrian Church known as the Church of Anjoor. The bishop of Anjoor known as Philoxenos II remained as the bishop of the Malankara Church when it had no bishops at least two occasions. He had also consecrated two or three bishops. Mar Athanasius of Marthoma Syrian Church died all on a sudden without consecrating his successor. In such a difficult situation, it was the bishop of Anjoor who came to our help and ordained Titus I as the bishop, in Kottayam Cheriya Palli. It was the Marthoma Metropolitan who ordained Geevarghese Mar Koorilose as the Metropolitan of Thozhiyoor. Though these two Churches have no uniformity in faith, they remain in mutual communion.

Abraham Malpan and the Reforming Movement in the Malankara Church

Abraham Malpan was a priest who worked in association with the missionaries in the Old Seminary which was set up for the training of the clergy in the Malankara Church. (Malpan=Professor) When the missionaries started to work independently they invited Abraham

Malpan to join them. But Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan instead of joining them, turned to a reforming movement in the Church along with some other priests. They made reforms in the faith and practice in the Church on the basis of the knowledge they got from the Bible. The open declaration of this was made with the following statements: “Give up the practice of praying to Virgin Mary and the Saints; Give up the practice of stating during the Holy Communion that the Bread and Wine as body and blood of Jesus Christ. The order of the Holy Qurbana must be translated into Malayalam from Syriac and the service must be conducted in Malayalam.” Bishop Cheppad Mar Dionysius and other Church leaders were displeased with this new movement. They ex-communicated Abraham Malpan. As Abraham Malpan felt the need for a Bishop to carry on the reforming movement, he sent his brother’s son Deacon Mathew to the Patriarch of Antioch for consecration. He returned after a year as Mathews Mar Athanasius, who fought against Bishop Cheppad Mar Dionysius for the position of Malankara Metropolitan and was declared to be so, by the government in 1852 through a proclamation.

Mathews Mar Athanasius ruled as Malankara Metropolitan, from 1852 to 1876. Those who were moving against him grew stronger and they wanted a higher authority who will respond to their needs. They sent Rev. Joseph Pulikkottil from Kunnampulam, to the Patriarch. He was consecrated as Joseph Mar Divannasius and once he returned, he began to work against Mathews Mar Athanasius. The proclamation of the installation of Athanasius was withdrawn in 1876. When the efforts of Mar Dionysius were found to be ineffective, the Patriarch of Antioch was invited to visit Malankara. He came in 1875 and strengthened his position here. Even before his arrival Mathews Mar Athanasius was ex-communicated (There is no documentary evidence for this). A friendly meeting between the Patriarch and Mar Athanasius did not materialize. The faction against those who stood for the reforming movement grew stronger. Mathews Mar Athanasius passed away in 1877.

It was in 1845 that Abraham Malpan died. It is said that he died in fear and anxiety about the reforming movement. But bishop Mathews Mar Athanasius acted bravely. Rev. Thomas, the son of Abraham Malpan was installed as a bishop by Mar Athanasius. He was known as Thomas Mar Athanasius. When he was ruling the Church, bishop Pulikot Mar Dionysius got Old Seminary and Vattippanam, by a court order. Gradually Thomas Mar Athanasius and those in the reforming movement lost all the churches and properties. They got just three churches – Kozhencherry, Maramon and Kottarakara. They also got one half out of the total days of worship in the six churches of Thevalakkara, Mallappally, Chengannur, Perinad, Koorthamala, Thalavady Padinjarekkara.

Thomas Mar Athanasius passed away in 1893. He died without consecrating a successor. Those who opposed the followers of the reforming movement thought that without bishops, this movement would die. Though there was a lot of opposition, the bishops came from Anjoor and Rev. Titus, the youngest son of Abraham Malpan was consecrated as the Malankara Metropolitan. He came to be known as Titus I. He was a deeply devout man. It was during his time that all the work for the steady growth of this Church that stood for a reformation here, was begun. Educational institutions, (M. T. Seminary, S. C. Seminary) Suvishesha Prasanga Sanghom and Maramon Convention were begun. It was also during the period of this holy man that many court-cases about the churches and unfavourable verdicts came up. As it was convinced that one more bishop was needed to help in the Church administration, Rev. Titus of Palakunnathu was elected as bishop and Titus II was consecrated as bishop, in Puthencavu Church by Titus I in the presence of the bishop of Anjoor. Titus I passed away in 1910. It was during the period of Titus II that many new churches were built. Taksas on Qurbana, Baptism and the Holy Week were translated from Syriac to Malayalam and published during his time. It was also during his period that the Church came to have its own system of administration. As there arose the need for two more bishops in the Marthoma Syrian Church, Rev. Abraham of Maret in Kallooppara

was consecrated as bishop Abraham Suffragan Metropolitan in 1917. He was popularly known as Maret Thirumeni. Titus II passed away in 1944 and Abraham Marthoma became the Metropolitan. During the period of his ministry, evangelical work got a new life. He made a constant effort to spread the ideal that every Christian must be an evangelist and a witness to Christ. It was under his leadership that the Sannadha Suvishesha Sangham (Voluntary Evangelist Association) and Sevika Sanghom (Womens Auxilery) were formed. It was because of the greatness of his personality that the Marthoma Church came to be widely known here in India as well as abroad. He passed away in 1947 in the midst of as well as the result of hard work leaving his ministry to the Church that was still fighting against odds.

Two new bishops were installed on 30 December 1937. With the installation of Yuhanon Mar Timotheos (Yuhanon Marthoma) and Mathews Mar Athanasius, the Church began its diocesan activities. Three more clergymen were elected as bishops in 1952. Alexander Mar Theophilus, (Alexander Marthoma) Thomas Mar Athanasius and Philipose Mar Chrysostom were consecrated as episcopas. In the consecration ceremonies of 1937 and 1953, besides the Anjoor Bishop Bishop Sandegreen of Sweden also participated.

THE FAITH AND THE PRACTICE OF THE MARTHOMA CHURCH

There are those who denounce our Church for its lack of compilation of its faith and practice. This is a reproach that can be raised against all Eastern Churches. The proclamation of faith and practice can be sometimes an obstacle to the growth of the Church. Yet it is necessary to fix its basic creed and to have a general understanding about it. The Eastern Churches do not have such proclamation of Faith like the Anglican Church's "Thirty-nine Articles of Faith". For them the ancient creeds of faith and liturgy will be the document of their faith and teachings. The Fathers will interpret them and teach people.

As far as our Church is concerned, we have the freedom to accept such faith and practices which are not against the principles that we must hold on to, such spiritual ideals that will contribute to our spiritual growth and that which not be against the teaching of the Bible. For example it is permissible to observe the Founder's day if any church is named after a saint. There can be sermons and worship, but the belief that any favors can be received by special prayers and dedication of the offertory to the saint is taboo to us. We cannot attain any virtue through them.

The following are noted in our Church Constitution as irrevocable faith and practices.

The Constitution of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church Declarations

Section 1

The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, believed to have been founded by Saint Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, and known by the name of the Apostle, is part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This Church in conformity with the faith of the Christian Church in all ages, believes, in Jesus Christ, God incarnate for the redemption of humankind, and in the Triune God revealed by Him, who is himself one in that Trinity.

The Holy Bible consisting of the sixty-six books comprised in the Old and New Testaments, accepted by the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church as the basis for all matters of doctrine and faith; and the Nicene Creed, formulated in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, shall, in no wise be altered in any manner by any one. Likewise, the Ministry of Deacon, Priest and Episcopa, the rites of Church Dedication, Church Consecration, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion (Qurbana), Holy Matrimony, Unction of the Sick, Funeral (Burial) Service as well as the observance of Sundays, Lents, and Dominical Feasts, shall not at any time be abolished.

This Church accepts as its goal and function: to be the repository of the divine doctrine revealed by Jesus Christ and proclaimed by His Apostles; to maintain these doctrines in their purity; to promote the spiritual life of its members through the administration of Sacraments and by the ministry of the WORD; to make disciples of all nations by the proclamation of the Gospel to all the world, and through the administration of Holy Baptism in the name of the Triune God.

Here the reference is to the performance of sacraments. But we must not think that we give the same equal importance to all of them as the Holy Communion and Baptism are mentioned along with the prayer for the sick, for house-dedication etc. We may feel that of the

seven sacraments recognized by the Church, only five – Baptism, Qurbana, Prayer for the Sick, Marriage and Ordination alone are in the list, above mentioned. It is wrong to assume that we have not accepted the sacraments of confirmation and confession. They are there – confirmation as part of Baptism and Confession as part of Qurbana. It is wrong to say that the Marthomites have only two sacraments. This Church has all the seven sacraments. Its vision and creed may be different from those of other Churches. Our Church does not insist on private confession to the priest, whereas the Catholic, Jacobite and Orthodox Churches do insist on this practice. We can understand from the Udayamperoor Synod that the Malankara Church did not have this practice. We have the system of public confession as that is prevalent in the Anglican Church.

The modern reformers Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan made the following changes in the Taksa, which were accepted by the Church Assembly in 1927.

1. Removal of prayer to the saints.
2. Removal of prayers for the dead.
- 3-6. Removal of some prayers
7. Removal of the note that the censer must be blessed.
8. Change of a prayer during the blessing of the bread and wine.
9. Change of another prayer.

The changes in the rites

1. Bread and wine must be given separately.
2. Private Confession to the clergyman was stopped.
3. No Holy Communion be celebrated if there are no recipients.

Everybody will be convinced that Abraham Malpan criticized and rejected those rites and systems of beliefs that had grown corrupt and those which were obstacles in the path of spiritual growth.

Here are some more notes about some important beliefs of the Church.

1. Trinity: The faith in Trinity is a definite teaching in the Nicene Creed that is in accordance with the Bible. Jewish, Christian, Muslim

religions proclaim faith in One God. But the Christian faith in One God is as the faith in the Trinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. This is how it was experienced by the Apostles who testified Jesus as God; this is how it is recorded in the scriptures.

Athanasian Creed was to affirm the faith in Trinity. A few sentences in this way confuse some people. “This is the Catholic faith; it is that we worship the One God in Trinity and Trinity in One.” This is not something grasped by intelligence but “recognized as a subject to be worshipped”. This is not something that the Apostles developed in their council after debates. On the other hand, the faith in Trinity is the verbal proclamation of a reality experienced in a life which was made possible because of the faith in Jesus. The Jews had absolute faith in One God. The Apostles who were Jews lived with Jesus and saw in him God the Father Christ himself claimed that he was the Son of God. He also told the Apostles: “he that hath seen me has seen the Father”. They were convinced that without Christ they did not know God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,2,14). This is the testimony of the Apostles. They could see or worship God the Father only through Son or worship God the Father only through God the Son. During the last supper our Lord promised: “And I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; I will not leave you comfortless”. According to this promise they had the experience of the Holy Spirit on Pentecostal day and this further strengthened the reality of the Father and the Son. They experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit as the presence of Christ. The basis of the teaching of Trinity is something that cannot be understood and grasped by the ordinary intelligence.

Though the teaching of Trinity is beyond the grasp of our intelligence, we cannot write it off as unreasonable or illogical. We see a Trinity within ourselves. We are the soul, body and mind. Though one, it is three; though three, it is one. God was there before everything. As God is love, whom does He love if His is One. For one who loves

there must be an object of love. Thus there is God who is love; then there is the one who is loved; and then there is the Spirit of this love relationship. Can't we see such a nature of Trinity in God? Such Philosophic thoughts explain Trinity. For us, ordinary people it will be easy to meditate on Trinity in the following way. The God whom we worship must be the one who created us. The God we worship must be the one who saved us; the one who protects us; and who sustains us. The truth in the belief in the Triune God – Father Son and the Holy Spirit – is the belief in the God who creates, saves and sustains us.

When theology refers to God's Person, it doesn't refer to the physical body such as humans have. For the development of the 'person' in us, we need the body. Thought, intelligence, decision, the power to choose, emotions like love and hatred, purpose and activity are the attributes of the 'person' in us. When it is said that God is 'person', it is suggested that he has the above mentioned attributes.

That God who the Jews worshipped as Jehovah, the Creator, Lord and Father is the only true God. We can imagine this Father – Son relationship in Trinity as we see inseparably the light and heat in the sun. Just as light is born of the sun, the Son was born of the Father, and not created. The Son is one with the Father in power, eternity, purpose and nature. The Son left aside his power and glory and was born as a human being. He is perfectly divine and perfectly human. He became a human being for the life and redemption of us, human beings. God had decided upon his suffering and death on the cross for the redemption of the human race; it was to be a sacrifice. In Christ there is redemption for everybody. The resurrected Lord intercedes for us as he sits at the right side of his Father. At the time of death Jesus' body was separated from his soul. But on resurrection the spirit joined the body; the old physical body became spiritual body and was taken to heaven. The third person in Trinity, the Holy Spirit came from the Father and is equal to the Father and the Son. He is the Comforter promised by Jesus Christ. In the Nicene Creed, there was just one condensed sentence. "I believe in the Holy Spirit also". Later another teaching entered the Church. It was that the Holy Spirit was just a

breath and a power of influence that was not a person. So in the second General synod at Constantinople, an explanatory sentence that the Holy Spirit is a person, was added. The sentence accepted at Constantinople was, "...who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father"

In AD 1153, the bishops under Pope added: in the creed "From the Father and from the Son". As a result the Church Fathers of the East broke away from the Western Fathers. This separation in the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches was attributed due to the change, the Western Church made in Nicene Creed. The real reasons were the relationships among nations disputes about Church administration and customs and traditions. The Eastern Church Fathers – Greek, Syrian, Russian, Armenian and Persian – maintained that the sentence "From the Father and From the Son", would lead to the ignoring of the difference between the Father and the Son. The Western Church argued that the sentence "who proceeds from the Father ..." would give a subordinate position to the Son. The main reason for this difference of opinion was the unwillingness to unite. Recently the theologians of the Anglican and Eastern Churches have accepted a sentence which leads to mutual agreement. The sentence is: "Proceeded from the Father through the Son...".

2. The Holy Bible, of Christians consists of two parts, The Old Testament and The New Testament. There are altogether sixty-six books. As the Roman Catholic Church has its own translation and publication committees, the Bible published by the Bible Society is known as the Protestant Bible. The Hindus believe that the Vedas are God's utterings jotted down by the Rishis; so do the Muslims believe that the Koran is God's utterance. Christians have no such belief about the Bible. (Of course there are people and groups who believe that every word and every sentence in the Bible was dictated by God). We believe that the Bible is God-inspired. Lord's chosen people the Israelites were behind the Old Testament; behind the New Testament, there was the Christian Church chosen by God. In every age there have arisen from among people God-inspired individuals who have

heard His voice. The Bible was written by these individuals. The Bible is the writings of people who have been used by God. Each writer under the inspiration of God wrote the messages he got in his language. Before there was an inspired book, there was an inspired people. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. Some books of the New Testament were in Aramaic also. The Bible is the summary of some historical incidents, which were God's doings. The call for Abraham, the Egyptian captivity and the liberation of the Israelites, the Law got through Moses during the journey through the desert, the beginning of the Israel Church, the stay and the reign in Palestine, the sojourn in Babylon and the activities of the prophets during four centuries are the Old Testament incidents.

In the New Testament we have, the birth, the public ministry and the death of Jesus. The history of the Christian Church that originated from all this is also recorded in the New Testament. God spoke to the world through the historical incidents and through the messages of the prophets and the Apostles; through them he revealed Himself. "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son... (Hebrews 1:1). We believe that this Son, our Lord Jesus Christ is the total and ultimate revelation of God. The Bible was written by more than forty-four writers, stretching over a period of more than a thousand years. It is not just one book but a collection of books. We have in it historical books, moral codes, poems, songs, life-histories, essays and all branches of literature. The history of God's saving the world through Jesus lies stretched from the first book of Genesis till the last book of Revelation. What distinguishes the Bible from other books and makes it unique is the fact that we can see Jesus Christ in it. We read and study the Bible to communicate with Christ and to hear the Word.

Our Church has accepted the Bible as the basis for doctrines. The Bible must be the foundation for all doctrines and teachings for salvation. But we do not insist that there must be an underlying verse for all the teachings and practices of our Church. The Nicene Creed is the

declaration of the Catholic or Universal Church (not of the Roman Catholic Church) once we accept it we remain in the faith of the Catholic Church of a single faith. Any teaching that is against the verses in the Bible or its general nature is not acceptable to us.

There are different systems of Biblical interpretations such as, the literal, figurative, mystical and critical. We have not judged any one of them as wrong; nor have we taken any one of them as totally acceptable. However the approach of those who study each book separately and take the Holy Spirit away from the making of the Bible, is dangerous.

There are those who read the Bible to study history; some read it to enjoy the English language; some to glean the moral percepts; some search for verses that can serve as the basis for teachings. Thus people read the Bible with different interests, which are not unjustifiable. But the meditation motive must never be lost when we study the Bible. We must read the Bible everyday to hear the Word of God and to know His message for us.

The Infallibility of the Bible

What do we mean when we say that the Bible is infallible? It is not the error-free basis for the knowledge in history, geography and science. For each branch of knowledge there are books prepared by scholars and they are the fundamental texts. The Bible is infallible on these subjects – sin, redemption, divine nature and human nature. It gives us unmistakable knowledge about conquering sin and experiencing God here in this world and in the world beyond it.

3. Human beings and Sinful Nature

The Bible teaches us that God created the human in His own image. He shaped the first human being from the dust of this earth and blew life into his nostrils, and then the human became a living being. So there is something divine and something of this earth in a human being. If convent school children are asked why God created Man they would immediately answer that God made human beings to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever and ever. God created the human

and settled him in Eden to be in constant relationship with him. In the book of Genesis we read how the humans fell away from that relationship with God. Sin isolates people from God.

God found that all that He created was good. Then from where came sin? The Bible does not give an answer to this question. The Old Testament reminds us that in the field where wheat is sown, there is an enemy who plants weeds. The Greek word Demon and the Hebrew word Satan stand for the devil and mean 'enemy'. The Bible does not explain how an enemy to God came into being. But it tells us very clearly how we fell into sin. (Genesis 3) A desire, a glance cherished deep within; temptation grows stranger and ends in a sinful act. This part of the Bible makes it very clear that sin springs from our doubts about God.

The Bible sees human beings as those who need redemption. Human being is inherently inclined towards sin. There is in human a conflict between the body and the soul; this is something we experiences. A human cannot do good by his/her own goodness and efforts. St. Paul explains this experience of human beings in Romans 7:15f). "It is through Jesus that we have the emancipation from sin." God has given us the freedom to distinguish between good and evil and choose good. The carnal human is more prone towards sin. God has not created us as mechanical beings. God would like us to choose good and to do His will. He will not lead anyone to goodness by force. He wants us to choose good and to do His will. This increases our responsibility. We must use our freedom of choice to glorify God. There is with us a Redeemer who removes our weakens and strengthens us to choose good. Human being is a creature in need of redemption.

There are religions which teach us that the world is a scene of battle between good and evil or light and darkness. But the Bible says that Satan, the enemy of God, the creator of everything, has been conquered by Christ and so he has failed. The divine spirit dwells in a sinful body. There are some religions that teach us that the body in itself is abominable. But the Bible says that the body is the living temple

of God. God used the body to reveal His Glory and Perfection. So it is our duty to guard our body carefully, knowing that it is God's tool for His divine action. Let us live remembering that we have come from God whom we have to glorify here.

4. The Justification through Faith by Grace

The Grace of God and the divine action for the redemption of human being became real in our Lord's death on the cross. Human is justified before God through faith in God and by the Grace of God. It was not we who chose Him but it was He who chose us. Our inherent goodness or good actions do not make us worthy of redemption or the love of God. Our faith and reliance upon God will be revealed through our way of life and our good actions.

5. Repentance and the forgiveness of Sins

God will forgive all our sins if we truly repent and confess. The scriptures say that the sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. This is not a particular act of sin. It is a sinful attitude of living. Even with the knowledge of values like goodness, love and justice, the sinful attitude of living makes repentance impossible. And this is what is considered the sin against the Holy Spirit. God redeems repenting sinners.

6. Chosen and Pre-destined

The redeemed who come to the perfection of justice become aware that they have been pre-destined and chosen for redemption by the abundant Grace of God. With this awareness they experience joy and courage. St. Paul understood his experience of repentance as something pre-destined by God even before his birth. By call and pre-destination St. Paul meant the will or the mind's decision of those who are redeemed. It does not mean that God has chosen some for redemption and some for damnation. It is true that God is all-powerful (Omnipotent) and all-knowing (Omniscient). But there is no pre-destination as to those to be redeemed and those to be damned. The teaching about pre-destination will put out the sense of responsibility and the seal to act in co-operation with the Holy Spirit.

7. The Universal (Catholic) Church

The Christian Church has been established by Jesus Christ as a continuation of his redemptive ministry and the fulfillment of God's will. It cannot be said that only one Church among the many many Churches of today is the one established by Christ in accordance with God's will. The Universal or Catholic Church is the collection of all those believers who belong to the Churches scattered all over the world, and who truly love and worship God, bear testimony to Christ the Word, and receive the sacraments of Baptism and Qurbana and wait for his glorious Second Coming and the realization of the Kingdom of God. The duty entrusted to the Church is the preservation and propagation of the Christian life. The Church has the right to form the faith and practice and the administrative measures for thus. Therefore the Church has also the authority to perform the sacraments which are the means of grace. But people must be persuaded to receive for their salvation only those teachings that are evident and authoritative in the light of the scriptures. The Church must not implement any rite or ritual that is against the verses and their meanings in the scripture.

The word 'Catholic' first came into use for that church which was different from the Jewish Church meant only for Jews. But the Christian Church, meant for everybody in the world transcends the barriers of nations and creeds and embraces all humankind. Today it is divided into many branches. So it is wrong if any church claims to be 'catholic'.

The word 'church' is the translation of the Greek word '*ecclesia*'. We can give it the meaning: the people called apart by God. the Jewish community is known as the Church of the desert.

The following alone need be considered as Catholic belief.

1. Accept the Bible as the word of God.
2. The acceptance of the beliefs in the Nicene Creed.
3. The Christian priesthood in accordance with Episcopal tradition.
4. The performance of sacraments like Baptism and Qurbana.
5. The belief that Christ will come as the Judge
6. The belief in the life after death.

The words 'One', 'Holy', Catholic' and 'Apostolic' that describe the Church are very meaningful.

(i) Church is one

At the time of forming the Nicene Creed the Church was united. What right have we today to describe the Church as united when it stands divided? The Church is one in the eyes of God. It is united in the belief of accepting Christ as God and Redeemer. That is why it is said that it is a given unity. People split the Church. But there is the God-given unity to unite the Church. In this confession of words we must see the Church as one.

(ii) The Church is Holy

The Church was not something humanly established. God has established it as holy. It does not mean that those who join as its members become holy or that all those in the Church are holy and therefore the Church is holy. When the New Testament uses the word holy it does not mean that a particular person or establishment is holy. It only means that something or somebody is called apart to be holy. The Church is holy in this sense. It is able to lead to holiness those who become its members. The Church is the arena of the Holy Spirit's activity. She is the mother and family that lead individuals and communities to holiness. The holiness of the family (Church) to which we belong must be the inspiration to make us come to holiness.

(iii) The Church is Catholic (Universal)

The Church in the Old Testament was only for those born as Jews. They believed that salvation was only for the Jewish race. If people from other creeds entered the Jewish Church they were given just the status of proselytes. But the Church universal will accept all Christian believers, no matter to whichever caste or creed they belong. It receives everybody and leads everybody to the path of salvation. It is Catholic as it calls everybody and makes them the children of God. To many people the Catholic Church is that Church under the Pope. The name of that Church is the Roman Catholic Church.

(iv) The Church is Apostolic

The word Apostolic is interpreted in four ways.

1. Established by the Apostles
2. The Church that has accepted Apostolic faith which it observes and maintains.
3. The Church that has continually received the blessing of succession (laying on hands) from the Church that has been established by the Apostles.
4. The Church that carries out the Apostolic functions. The meaning of the word 'Apostle' is 'one who is sent'. It was the Apostles who were entrusted with the duty of preaching the life-giving gospel. So the Church that preaches the gospel has a claim to the title 'Apostolic'.

All the four interpretations emphasise four different aspects.

The Life after Death

Our Church has not made any definite statement about the life after death. The prayers for the dead, promise of offers and intercession to the saints etc. have not the apparent sanction of the Bible and they are against the practice of the ancient Church. We are now convinced that they have been the cause of many wrong practices in those Churches which accepted them. They show interest in the study of the life after death as well as the opportunity to be redeemed even after death our Church has abandoned them. The prayers for those who are ill and the prayers during the funeral service have been so designed to be the opportunities to exhort people about the life after death. In the epistles to Corinthians and Thessalonians the state after death is described as a state of sleep. But in the epistle to Philippians St. Paul speaks of death as passing away and being with Jesus. The members of the Church have the freedom to choose any from these two.

3

SACRAMENTS

The performance of certain rites by using material things (matter) as a sign and means of attaining spiritual blessings is called a sacrament in the Christian Church. St. Augustine describes sacrament thus:

“Visible Word”; “The Visible Word of invisible Grace”; “the normal means for imparting Grace to the Soul”. The description of the Anglican Church also hints the same idea: “The visible and outer sign of inner and spiritual Grace”. The Eastern Orthodox Church gives a more detailed description of sacraments. The rite that was established by God in visible form and that which imparts invisible Grace to the soul of a believer and becomes the cause of Divine Grace.

Martin Luther has said that we human beings live by means of the five senses. In his book *The Nature and call of The Church* William Stuart says that ‘we must understand that our inner spirit is related to our sense experiences and what we experience in the depth of our heart is not something isolated from our physical experience. The basic principle of sacraments is the inextricable relationship between the material and the spiritual. In the Christian Church God’s promises are specially related to some particular rites and they are named sacraments.’

Three words are to be noted in our study of sacraments.

1. Mysterion

The Greek Church uses this word for Qurbana. St. Paul uses the word 'mystery' for divine secrets which the human mind cannot grasp on its own and which have been revealed through Christ. By this word the Greek Church suggests that in sacraments there is something beyond ordinary human understanding.

2. Sacrament

The Greek word '*mysterion*' has been translated into Latin by the word '*Sacramentum*'. *Sacramentum* was the word used for the oath of allegiance which the Roman soldiers made to their emperor.

3. Ordinances

Churches like the Baptists hold the view that the use of words like Mysterion and Sacrament will suggest a greater meaning for the Lord's Supper and Baptism than that given in the New Testament. These Churches want the term 'ordinances' to be used for those rites which our Lord performed and commanded us to carry on.

All these three words point out the different aspects of sacraments.

The Number of Sacraments

In the early Churches neither the definition nor the number of sacraments has been officially announced. One writer has said that thirty rites have been considered sacraments in the 12th century. In the Western Church which at that time was under the Pope, the number of sacraments had been fixed as seven. In the Middle Ages the following sacraments have been accepted both in the Western and Eastern Churches.

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Qurbana
4. Confession
5. Prayer for the Sick
6. Marriage
7. Ordination

The Indispensable Elements of Sacraments

. Matter

Some material things are indispensable to sacraments. For example: bread and wine for Qurbana; water for Baptism.

. Celebrant

A person, appointed to perform the sacrament is necessary. For each sacrament there is a particular celebrant. For example Qurbana must be celebrated by the priest.

. Form

For each sacrament the celebrant must use some particular material object and some particular words and sentences. For example the priest who performs the Qurbana must particularly say the words of institution. This is the form of the Qurbana.

. Intention

Each sacrament is performed with a particular purpose. The celebrant as well as the one who partakes in it must have this purpose and concern in mind. For example it is the washing off from sins and the experience of new life that are the purpose of Baptism.

. The Lord's Commandment or the Scripture

The authority and the result of sacraments depend on the Word of God. the Church performs sacraments and individuals and communities partake in it because they are related to Christ's promise and commandments. The Church performs Qurbana because there is the Lord's word: "Take eat, this is my body".

The Experience of Sacraments

It is by faith that we experience the Grace (the blessing) of sacraments. It is a danger that the performance of sacraments can become the mere performance of a rite. We must understand that there is nothing magical in a sacrament. It is the word of God that gives value to the sacrament. For receiving the Grace from the sacrament faith is necessary but faith does not create anything. We enter the blessed experience of sacraments when we approach them in faith.

DOMINICAL SACRAMENTS/ GOSPEL SACRAMENTS

Of the seven sacraments Baptism and Qurbana deserve a special place. These two have the evident sanction of Lord Jesus Christ and are compulsory to all Christians. They are called Dominical Sacraments. The meaning of the Latin word “*Dominus*” is Lord. They are also known as gospel sacraments. These two are to be studied in greater detail.

It is said that the Marthomites have only two sacraments. We believe that all Christians must partake of Baptism and Qurbana as they have the evident sanction of the Lord and so compulsory for all Christians. Yet the Marthoma Church has accepted the other sacraments also and perform them.

1. Baptism

The first in the list of sacraments is Baptism. This is the sacrament for the entry into the Church. The matter (material thing) for this is water. But according to the teaching of the Early Church a lay person has also the right to baptize. “In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, in the hope of redemption and eternal life – is baptized.” This was the form used by the Syrian Church. The form in the Roman and Anglican Church is “I baptize”. It indicates the authority of the Church. The form of the Syrian Church “is baptized”, indicates that it is the Holy Spirit that baptizes. The purpose of baptism is to die in sim

and resurrect into new life with our Lord. The prayer at the time of baptism explains the purpose of baptism. May he wear the eternal new person, having shed the old person. St. Paul says that by baptism we are buried with him. Just as Jesus Christ resurrected from among the dead by the Glory of his Father, we must attain through baptism the inner experience of dying with the Messiah to walk in new life, to live in new life. As there are many teachings about baptism it is necessary to answer some questions. There are these various modes of baptism – infant baptism, adult baptism by faith, baptism by immersion, baptism by pouring water on the head etc. There are teachings about each of them.

Infant Baptism

What is the authority and justification for infant baptism? There are no verses in the Bible that has a clear basis for infant baptism. In the Acts and the Epistles, all that is recorded is the baptism of adults. In the first history of the Church it is possible to speak of only the baptism of those adults who came to faith by hearing the gospel. But once the believers were baptized with the entire family and children were born to them there arose a question. Even during the time of the Apostles, the question as to the age for baptism began to be asked. Christ had not given any special instruction about this. The disciples remembered how Christ had blessed the children brought to him. Blessing in the New Testament is by blessing with hands laid on the head. Christ blessed children because he had the power to bless and children had the power to receive this blessing. It is the Lord who gives the blessing during baptism. Does Christ have the power to bless children? Are the children within his circle? The Church has an answer on the positive to both these questions. Therefore the customs of baptizing infants began from the first century itself.

Faith and Baptism

Adult baptism by faith is that baptism received by individuals who come to believe in Jesus. Faith is a condition to receive spiritual blessing. The question as to how infants who do not have faith can receive

blessing is quite justified. Did Jesus heal the Centurion's son by the faith of the centurion or the faith of his dying servant? Jesus healed the servant on the basis of the Centurion's faith: "I have not found, so great faith, no, not in Israel". He healed the child of the woman from Canaan on the basis of her faith: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt". From these incidents we understand that the sick who are not able to reveal their faith and children too tender in age for faith can be held up to God, in faith by us. God will bless them. Infant baptism is performed on the basis of the belief that the parents who believe and openly declare their belief will bring up their children in that belief. The children are entrusted to godfathers and godmothers too. Infant baptism and Christian nurture must go together.

There are three elements in baptism – God, Church and the one who is baptized. In the case of adults, they themselves openly declare their faith. In the case of children the intercessors do it for them. God receives the one who is baptized and gives blessings. It is an occasion to renounce Satan, receive Jesus and declare the faith in him.

The Church is the arena and store-house for the working of the Holy Spirit. It receives the baptized into its fellowship and the experience of redemption. Children also come within the range of this redemption. The godfather and godmother have the responsibility to bring up the children in the faith they openly declare. To Martin Luther, the thought, "I have received baptism", gave courage and convinced him that he had come out of Satan's bondage and stood on Christ's side.

Baptism in Water

John the Baptist and Christ's disciples brought the repentant and the believing down into water and made them immerse in it. But with the increase in the number of Christians and the growth of the Church, this kind of baptism became inconvenient. The absence of ponds and pools nearby also was a reason. Thus began the practice of pouring water on the head. The pouring of water right on top of the head is symbolic of the whole body immersing in water. The Eastern Church's

teaching is such immersing. The infants are made to sit in the baptismal font and the priest pours water on the head with both hands.

We must remember the following facts about baptism. The Grace of God works in baptism. The Church performs it on the order of the Lord. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that gives the power to grow in grace. It may be with this purpose that the baptism service is followed by confirmation service.

Baptism just Once

All kinds of Baptism are the baptism into Christ in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. There was a custom in the 4th century of baptizing again those who renounced the Church during persecution and returned later. Some bishops of those days approved of this. But in the Nicene Synod of 325 it was decided that those who were baptized once must not be baptized again. "We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." One baptism, one faith and one heaven where all of us sit together.

The Holy Qurbana (The Holy Communion)

The night on which our Lord was betrayed he ate the bread and drank the wine of the Passover and gave them to his disciples "Take, eat and drink". This command forms the words of institution of the Holy Qurbana.

The first record of it in the scripture comes in 1 Corinthians 11:23-30. The three gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke also have written about the institution of the Lords Supper. Though John describes this he has not mentioned about our Lord's special blessing of the bread and wine. But there are those who teach that the talk and description in John 6 is in anticipation of the Last Supper.

The names for the Holy Qurbana

1. **Qurbana** is the accepted word in the Syrian Church. The meaning of the word is a gift or offering.
2. **Lord's Supper:** This holy sacrament was instituted at the time when the Lord had his supper with the disciples. There is in Qurbana

the idea that we have supper with the Lord and he offers himself to us as our food.

3. **The Holy Sacrament:** The word sacrament is used to include all sacraments. In the Anglican liturgy the Lord's Supper is referred to as the Holy Sacrament. The Qurbana is an occasion in which we enter into communion with the Lord and dedicate ourselves to him.
4. **Eucharist:** Eucharist is a word that has come from the Greek word *Eucharistio* which means thanksgiving.

The gospel writers have said that the Lord took bread and wine and 'and gave thanks'. The praise for the experience of redemption as a result of our Lord's glorious death on the cross, is reflected in the communion service.

5. **The Mass:** This is the word, the Roman Catholic Church uses for Qurbana. It does not have any meaning on its own. It has come from "*Ite Missa Este*". Today it means the offering that is Qurbana.
6. **The Holy Communion:** In Qurbana, the Christian believers enter into communion with Christ as well as with one another.

The answer to the question as to why the Qurbana was instituted is to be found in the context in which it was formed. Christ instituted it on the night in which he was to be taken away from his disciples. He instituted it as a visible sign and assurance of his real and spiritual presence even though he was going to be taken away physically. Just as we need material-food-for our physical body we need Jesus Christ for our spiritual sustenance. We receive the sanctified bread and wine through our physical mouth. The believer receives Christ in spirit. "I knock at the door and if any one opens the door I will go to him and will sup with him and he will sup with me". It is this voice of the Lord that we must hear when we receive Qurbana. It is from this idea that the title Holy Communion came.

The Qurbana – for Whom?

There are those who think that the Qurbana is the food for the holy people. Those who are perfect in holiness do not need Qurbana. When we hear that “These Holy things are given to holy people”. We may come to think that it is only for the holy. What is the response to it? “Holy is the one Father, Holy is the only Son. And Holy is the one Holy Spirit. Bless O Lord.” That is: The priest says that God the Trinity alone has this holiness. The Church invites us to find our anchor on the holiness of those God.

There are those who think that the Qurbana is offered and received for the redemption from sin and the Qurbana is for sinners. What gives redemption is the supreme sacrifice of Christ and his death on the cross alone-We partake of the Qurbana to make us one with the experience of that supreme sacrifice, reminding us of Christ’s death on the cross and his suffering. The Holy Qurbana is for those who repent, confess their sins and wish to live in oneness with Christ. It is for those who wish to make Jesus their spiritual sustenance. It is for those sinners who repent and wish to lead a holy life.

The Teachings about the Holy Qurbana

St. Paul says: “for we being many are one bread and one body; For we are all partakers of that one bread”(1 Cor.10:16,17) . He teaches that the Holy Qurbana denotes the unity and oneness of the Christian Church. But the experience is that it has caused split and division in the Christian Church. It is the insistence on the teachings about the Qurbana that causes this disunity.

The main cause of dispute is the interpretation of our Lord’s words of institution of the Qurbana. How must the Lord’s words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” be interpreted? Shall we take them literally or figuratively. What is the association of bread and wine with the body and the blood? It is in the answers to these questions that there is much difference of opinion.

The Church did not formulate any guidelines about Qurbana during the time of the Apostles or the first ten centuries of Church history.

There were among the Church Fathers, those who gave literal interpretation to the Lord's words, and those who interpreted and studied it figuratively. They remained as the members of the one united Church, that is to say the strength of the early Church was in its experience and not in its doctrinal formulations.

By the middle of the Middle Ages the Church under the Pope met officially and formulated the guidelines for transubstantiation. It was declared that when the ordained priest took bread and wine in his hands uttered the Lord's words of institution. 'This is my body, This is my blood', the substance of the bread became the substance of Christ's body and the substance of the wine became the substance of Christ's blood. This is what is called transubstantiation. From that day it became compulsory for the members of the Roman Catholic Church that they must accept this teaching. This still remains as the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Till the 16th century this was the unquestionable teaching of the Church in Europe. Martin Luther, the leader of the reformation in Europe questioned the teaching of transubstantiation as he rejected some teachings of the Roman Catholic Church which he found against the scriptures. The bread and wine do not change as body and blood. On the other hand Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world gives himself through them. Consubstantiation is that Jesus offers his body to people through these holy things with them and under them. Contrary to Luther's teaching, the Swiss reformer Swingly gives significance to the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ. His teaching of Qurbana is as remembrance and sign. But when he speaks of it as remembrance and sign it has a deeper meaning than that given by some people of today. This is evident from the following statement: During the time of the Holy Communion, the celebrant receives the Lord's body and blood factually, spiritually and sacramentally. We notice much difference between Luther and Swingly in the use of the expressions about this teaching. Yet there is much agreement about the experience. Calvin, another leader of Reformation saw and experienced Christ's presence not in the material things of the Qurbana but in the entire service.

Apart from transubstantiation, remembrance and sign, Christ's presence all throughout the service etc. there are many other teachings in other Churches: they are receptionism for those who believe: There is virtualism experiencing of Christ's qualities: there is spiritual presence. A writer called Forsyth has formulated a teaching that is worthy of respect. When someone receives them as God's gifts, he/she turns them into the path and means of giving himself/herself to the Church. Our Church has not officially accepted a teaching about Qurbana. But here are two statements generally accepted. The Liturgy Committee report of the Malayalam era 102: (1) During the Holy Qurbana, Christ gives himself to the believers and they experience communion. The Church does not insist on or reject any of the following teachings: (1) The body and blood of Christ become present amidst people during worship as sanctified bread and wine; (2) There is no such presence. But our Church rejects the teachings of transubstantiation and localization.

“We believe that during the Holy Qurbana the Lord gives himself to us and we enter into communion with him, whether as symbol of the bread and wine, the believer spiritually experiencing some presence” (Joint Statement 1955).

We have the right to study and teach about these views. But it is the emphasis of the early Church that we must have. What is important is not the acceptance of the teachings about Qurbana but the experiencing of the body and blood (the Life) of our Lord.

In the Holy Qurbana we remember Christ's death on the Cross and become one with his suffering and with his supreme sacrifice. We enter into communion with Christ as well as with one another. We commit ourselves to him and prepare the path for his coming and wait for him.

OTHER SACRAMENTS

1. Confirmation (Anointing with Holy Muroon)

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the Apostles or those sent by them lay their hands on the head of the baptized and pray for them and how they receive the Holy Spirit. This was what the Church formed as confirmation. In the Eastern Churches the oil consecrated by the head of the Church is applied on those who are baptized. In the Western Churches the bishops visit the parishes and lay their hands on those who are prepared and pray for them. In the Western Churches there is also the custom of preparing 13-14 year old boys and girls by taking classes for them and conducting the confirmation service. Though the anointing and confirmation are the same from the point of view of teaching, the Western custom has greater practical value. At a time when children pass through the stage of growth and start developing religious awareness and spiritual thoughts, it will be a great experience for them to be given such special preparation. That is why our Church has organized and arranged classes and service for the first communicants.

Some of our infants are baptized in the C.S.I. or Anglican Churches. Those who are baptized thus must be made to participate in the confirmation service or they must be brought for the anointing with Muroon in our Church.

The material object (matter) for anointing Muroon is oil. For confirmation it is the bishop's hand. The celebrant is the Episcopal Bishop. The form is the sentence used while the 'muroon' (holy oil) is applied or the hand is laid. The word form in our Church is: "... is anointed with Holy Oil as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to true believers, In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"- Amen.

The purpose of anointing with holy oil is for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the empowering of life, and the spiritual experience resulting from that. This sacrament assures us that in our conflict with the world, flesh and the devil, the Holy Spirit abides with us.

2. Confession

Confession is for the solace and courage and the renewal of communion with God for those, who are spiritually dead but who receive the assurance about the redemption from sin. The custom in the Anglican and Marthoma Church is to join in the public confession. The teaching in the Roman and Jacobite Church is that every individual must kneel before the priest and make private confession. The decisions in the Udayamperoor Synod prove that this was not the custom in the Malankara Church.

To confess and to repent was the message of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

There are three steps in confession:

1. Repent truly about the sins committed. Feel sorry in the depth of your heart, hate sin and grieve bitterly.
2. Confess the sins not to the priest but to God. He can and He will forgive sins.
3. Be assured of redemption, God's presence will be hidden because of sin. When sins are confessed and hated we shall hear the comforting and courage-inspiring words of God: "Your sins are forgiven". Thus we shall regain God's good-will. The priest gives us on behalf of the Church the assurance that the sins of those

who truly repent will be forgiven. The Lord has given authority to announce the freedom from sin to the Church.

The matter for the sacrament of confession is the tears of repentance. The sorrow that springs from true repentance may or may not be revealed as tears. The celebrant of confession is the priest. The form is the sentence, used for redemption from sin. The purpose of confession is the inner spiritual experience and the solace and joy of redemption as well as restored communion with God.

The Roman Catholic Church maintains that priests have the authority to give freedom from sin on behalf of the Church. The basis for the argument is our Lord's words to the paralysed man "Thy sins are forgiven" and also those words to the disciples after resurrection; "Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosever sins you retain they are retained" (Mark 2:10; John 20:22,23). But the basis of our faith is that none but God alone has the authority to forgive sins.

Confession must help us to hear God's words "Your sins are forgiven. Do not sin again".

3. Anointing the Sick

Sacraments have been formed to sanctify our life step by step. With Baptism we move away from raw life and enter by Grace the spiritual life. By the sacrament of the anointing with holy oil, or the sacrament of confirmation we attain the fullness of the Holy Spirit and get the strength for the struggle of life and for the ministry of God. Confession is for paving the way for the redemption from sins, the strengthening of our spiritual life and the experiencing of the redemption that was attained for us by the Passion of Christ. "The anointing with the Holy Oil for the sick and dying and prayers for them is for the solace and strength of the bed-ridden. Here the matter is oil and the form is the prayer of the priest. The basis for this sacrament is the verses in the epistle of James" – Ch.5:14,15: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith

shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

The prayer with the anointing of oil (Olive oil/Sythe) is prescribed as a means of healing the sick. But the Roman Catholic teaches it as a sacrament for preparing souls for the journey to eternity. In some Eastern Churches there seems to be a thinking that once the anointing with this oil is done, the devil's attendants will not reach hold of those on their way to Eternity. This thinking must have sprung from the literal descriptions during the service of the sacrament of anointing. Though we do not accept such teachings, we have two services for the sick. The prayers in the first part is for the healing of the sick. The second part of the service is for those who are very weak and mortally ill. This service gives solace to the patients' mind and strength for the spirit. Such patients are entrusted to God and prayers are made for their redemption. If the patients are conscious they must be given Qurbana also.

4. Marriage

The Roman Catholic Church also agrees to the opinion that marriage and ordination are different from the five above mentioned sacraments, which are meant for everybody; marriage and ordination are for those who enter into them.

The union between a man and a woman in marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. It is a relationship that can be severed only by death. Marriage is not just a contract between a man and a woman. It is a pledge taken in the presence of God and an opportunity to attain the Grace to live this life. Therefore it is a sacrament. The Western Church holds the view that the ministers of this sacrament are the man and the woman who are united in marriage. The priest is a witness and just confers blessings on behalf of the Church. In the Eastern Churches the priest himself is the minister. When the man and woman who enter into marriage in the substantiation of this sacrament and stand holding each other's hands the priest reads the portion from the gospel which is its word form. The Grace for family life is received from this.

5. Ordination

We believe that Christ himself appointed first the Apostles and then through them the order of priests for the administration of sacraments, the preaching of the Word and the administrative supervision of the Church. The service of calling apart and appointing individuals as priests is a sacrament. The ordination service is for the attainment of God's special Grace and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. There are three orders of priesthood – priest (Kaseesa) and Deacons (Semsana) and that of Episcopa. The Episcopa has the authority to ordain priests. The minister of the ordination service is the Episcopa. The matter of this sacrament is the Episcopa's laying of hand. The word form is the sentence used by the Episcopa: "ordained to the position of ...for...vocation." No power magically comes to the person who is ordained just because of the laying of the hand or the utterance of the sentence that confers power. But to the person who participates in this service with spiritual preparation it is an occasion to commit himself to the service of God and to experience the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the Grace of God for performing that service for which he gave himself and for which the Church appointed him. It is the ordination service that God uses as a means for this. Therefore this is also considered a sacrament. The Roman Catholic Church alone insists on the celibacy of priests.

Those who enter priesthood must be individuals who have heard the call of God and committed themselves. They must also have got the approval of the public and appointed to that position by the Church. Ordination service is the gift, God Himself has given to the Church.

When the Christian Church separated itself from the Jewish Church, it was organized after the style of the Jewish Synagogue. Thus the position of the elders came into being. In the 6th chapter of the Acts of Apostles we read about the beginning of the order of Deacons. The chief among the elders were extolled to the position of the Episcopa, after the time of the Apostles. Thus the orders of the Deacons, Elders and Episcopa became prevalent in the entire Church

by 2nd century. Today there are Churches which have all the three orders, Episcopas, Elders and Deacons. There are Churches which have only just the two orders; Elders and Deacons. There are Churches which have just congregational rule. Thus there are Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches.

The Roman Catholic Church and some other Churches attribute mediator position to priesthood. But Churches like ours believe in representative priesthood. Here the priest represents people and offers prayers and praises and preaches the word of God and gives benediction.

6

THE NICENE CREED

The faith that St. Thomas declared in his words “My Lord and my God” is the faith of the Christian Church about Christ. What he meant was that he who until then was known as Rabbi and master was real God. Christ was perfect God and perfect Man was the belief of the Church right from the time of the Apostles. But to grasp the idea of being human and divine at the same time is beyond human intelligence. Right from 1st century A. D. many teachings were brought up to explain this. One such teaching was that Christ appeared human only in external appearance. That is to say his humanity was not real. Another teaching was this: Divinity descended upon Christ the human being at the time of his baptism on Jordan. During the time of his agony in Gethsemane divinity was taken away from him and it was Christ the human being who was crucified. This teaching was brought to explain how God died. The Church of the 1st century declared all this as breaches or schisms. John points out all this as the teaching of antichrist: “Hereby know ye the Spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” (1 John 4:2, 3) “For many deceivers are entered into the world who confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7)

As the 2nd and 3rd centuries were the periods of persecution. It was not a favourable time for debates and arguments. But in 313

A.D. Constantine won a great victory and became emperor. Persecutions ended and Christianity was declared as the recognized religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine himself accepted Christianity and peace was established over the whole empire. The Christian way became the way of the emperor and a new context was created for debates and arguments about Christ's identity.

The most historic schismatic teaching was that of Arius. He was a priest of Alexandria. In the beginning was God. He created Christ at the beginning of the ages, and sent him to this world to save fallen humanity. Christ was not God. He was created and near to God. He was revealed to us by God and was our redeemer. As this was a teaching that could be grasped by the human mind, many people thought it could be approved. This teaching spread wide. A deacon called Athanasius, who stood close to the Bishop of Alexandria, recognized the danger involved in this teaching. He explained it to the Bishop. This was his line of argument: The most special and essential belief of Christianity is the belief that God became Man. God who took up humanity alone can save people from their sinful nature. In Jesus Christ God became Man and Word took the form of flesh. There is no Christian way without this teaching. God became Man so that Man might become divine. Arius and Athanasius became the leaders of two factions and it seemed that the Church was about to split. At the time Constantine called a meeting of the bishops to end these controversies and to establish unity in the Church. The bishops met in Nicaea in AD 325. Earlier in AD 50 a meeting of the Apostles and the members of the Church in Jerusalem took place when there arose difference of opinion about receiving gentiles into the Church. This can be considered the first synod. The synod in Nicaea was convened on the basis of this tradition. Bishops came from different parts of the Roman Empire as the government's guests. Legend goes that 318 bishops came for the synod. The Emperor himself exhorted them to end all the schisms and to establish unity in the Church. Arius and Athanasius strongly argued in favour of their views. At the beginning of the meeting the majority of the bishops were on the side of Arius. But after the discussion for

some days, all except four bishops came to support Athanasius' arguments about Christ's identity. It is believed that the Nicene Creed we recite today in our worship was the Creed approved by this synod. Athanasius compulsorily added two phrases to negate and shatter Arius' argument. They are: "begotten, not made," "being of one substance with the Father". These phrases indisputably established the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

The first paragraph in the Creed states the teaching about God, the Father. The Creed of the early Church was just a small sentence. "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God". It suggested that he is my Redeemer. This declaration of faith was enough for those who came to the Christian Church from the Jewish Church. The Jews believed in the one and only God and recognized the divine nature about which the prophets taught. But when those outside the Jewish religion and those who believed in many gods started coming into the Church, it was not enough that they declared Jesus as the Son of God and Redeemer. So the declaration of faith in the one and only God became necessary. That was how the first paragraph of the Creed developed. There was no argument about its acceptance in the Nicene Synod. This first paragraph contains the ideas in the 6th chapter of Isaiah. God is glorious, mighty and holy. Everything is the creation of God who has fatherly affection. The Church tells all non-Jewish people not to worship the heavenly bodies and natural powers and all the visible and invisible powers as gods. Don't bow before any creation. Bow before the creator because He is as prophet Isaiah says, glorious, mighty and holy.

The second paragraph of the Nicene Creed declares the faith in Christ who was Word became flesh, revealed God to people and redeemed them. In this paragraph Christ's existence before he took birth, his human existence and his present existence at the right side of the Father and his second coming in judgement are clearly described.

In the third paragraph it is the declaration of the faith in the Holy Spirit. When the Nicene Creed was made into a document in 325 AD

There was just one small sentence affirming the faith in the Holy Spirit. But there developed in course of time a teaching that the Holy Spirit is a power and an influence and that personality should not be attributed it. It was Macedonius, a bishop of Constantinople who was mainly behind this teaching. With this controversy there arose a context in which there was a moving away from the Nicene Creed established by Athanasius about Christ's personality. The emperor called back Arius who was sent in exile and Athanasius was now exiled. Though he was exiled four times Athanasius stood firm in his belief. After many ups and downs those declarations approved in Nicaea came to have stronger support in the Church. Emperor Theodosius summoned a Synod to put an end to the controversies in the Church. This is the Council of Constantinople of 381. The Synod reaffirmed the Nicene Creed approved by the Synod of 325. To remove the Macedonian influence this sentence about the coming of the Holy Spirit was adopted. The sentence "I believe in the Holy Spirit" was elaborated into: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets and apostles." The Holy Spirit was always there with the Father and the Son and is the God who is worshipped with them. This explanatory sentence is to show that it is not just a power and an influence. Thus the Creed of Faith we repeat today was read and approved by the Council of Constantinople. It was not the wording of Nicaea that the Church got but that of Constantinople. So some scholars term it as the Constantinopolitan Creed. But the Fathers who met at the second Synod did not think that they made a new declaration of faith. They only claimed that they redeclared.

The Different Views of the Eastern and Western Church about the Procession of the Holy Spirit

Athanasius was exiled and Arius was recalled because the sentence in the approved Nicene Creed were questioned and there was an attempt to insert in it sentences that contained the teaching of

Arius. But Arius died before he returned to Constantinople and joined the Church. The second Synod affirmed the Nicene Creed. After the Synod of 381, some western Fathers in Europe who stood by the Roman Catholic Bishop wanted to bring into the Creed the idea that in the procession of the Holy Spirit the Son also has a place. In some areas the expression "From the Father and from the Son" began to be used. But no official decision was made anywhere. As a result of the growing power and strength of the Roman Bishop, the Eastern Fathers (of Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Babylon) were not in agreement with the Roman Bishop. And the once united Rome itself was divided into two as Eastern Roman Empire with Constantinople as the capital and Western Roman Empire with Rome as the capital. Those of East were scholars and philosophers and those of the West were practical minded. The Eastern Bishops had become weary of the claims of Pope. It was at this juncture that those Bishops from the Western Roman Empire under the influence of Pope met and in that Synod they officially included the phrase "From the Father and from the Son" in the Nicene Creed. With this the Eastern Fathers severed their connection with the Western Church. They declared that they would not have any connection with those who made alterations in the beliefs of the Fathers. The controversy about the procession of the Holy Spirit is known as Filioque Controversy (Filio=Son, Filioque=From the Son). The next first contact between these two Churches was only after nine hundred years when Pope Paul visited the Ecumenical Patriarch (Athanasios). In the 11th century two Church Fathers cursed each other as schismatics. Both Churches withdrew it in 1967.

The Eastern Fathers said that the difference between the Father and the Son disappears when we say "From the Father and from the Son". The Western Fathers said that the Son became inferior to the Father when it is said "who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son ..." Neither of them had the faith, for which they denounced each other. The split of 11th century was caused by the lack of the wish and circumstances to understand each other.

Theologians generally admit today that it was no theological difference of opinion.

The Beliefs Declared in the Nicene Creed

- . The belief in the Trinity – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.
- . Lord Jesus Christ is perfect God and perfect Man.
- . Jesus Christ is the saviour of individuals and society.
- . Death is not an end, there is life after death.
- . Jesus Christ will come again for judgement.
- . It is in the fellowship of the Church that we attain and experience these beliefs.

All these are the beliefs of the universal Church. We are in fellowship with the Churches who accept the Nicene Creed.

THE PREPARATORY SERVICE FOR THE COMMUNICANTS

This service may be used individually or collectively

Psalms 116, 38, 102:1-12

“Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy
Lord show mercy unto us; Messiah do mercy unto us, Our saviour
show mercy unto us.”

Spend a few minutes in silence to look yourselves.

The following questions may be asked

“Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my
thoughts. And see if there by any wicked way in me, and lead me in
the way everlasting.”

Do I live with the awareness of God’s presence?

Do I love anything more than God?

Have I fallen back to the sins I have abhorred and confessed?

Do I love in amity and love with others?

Do any sins hold me in bondage?

Do I cherish and bitterness against anybody?

Prayer

Lord be merciful unto me. I have sinned against you. Heal me and
turn towards me.

Show mercy to your servants.

Shed the light of your mercy upon us.

We seek refuge in you. Wash me from my secret sins.

Deliver me from the bondage of sin.

Lord hear our prayer and may our supplications be acceptable to you.

Prayer

Most merciful God, may our prayers be acceptable in thy presence. Enlighten our heart with the Holy Spirit. Grant us your Grace to let us participate with our friends in the Holy Communion and enable us to defeat the world; the flesh and the devil, to do your will, to serve you and to love you eternally. Amen.

Prayers

Anyone of them that suits the occasion may be used.

Lord come unto us to cleanse us; come unto us to heal us; come unto us to strengthen us. Lord, help us, who partake of your holy body and blood, not to forget you, not to move away from you and not to fall into thoughtlessness and sins but ever to be yours. Amen

Make our hands pure as we get ready to receive you, the Bread of Life.

Make our mouths pure as we partake the Holy Blood you shed for us.

God, our Father, make my conscience pure through the Holy Spirit. When our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us may there be a prepared temple in me.

Lord, cleanse our hearts and bodies for your service through the Holy Spirit.

Almighty and Eternal Father, increase in us faith, hope and love. Help us to attain what you promised and to love what you commanded.

Most merciful Jesus for us, you humbled yourself by coming and taking birth in a virgin's womb. Make us holy by your Holiness. Strengthen us by your strength. Keep our eyes away from all untruth

as we look into your Truth. Keep us away from all uncleanness. Shower your light into our minds to experience the Bliss of the Holy Communion and to serve you. Amen

Christ, the king of Glory, though our eyes cannot see your Glory and our ears cannot hear your life-giving voice, help us believe in the fellowship of the Holy Communion that you come to in accordance with your promise. Amen

Brighten our eyes to see you.

May the flame of your love touch our hearts to experience your presence and power.

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be our shield and fortress. May your Holy Blood be for our cleansing. May your Death be our entrance into Life. Amen

Jesus, you who know all secrets, who are full of mercy and kindness, I/we pray for the forgiveness of my/ our sins and iniquities, My/our Lord, keep your blessed and virtuous right hand on me/us. Save me/us from all wrongs and help me/us to live according to your will. I/we pray and plead with you in your unlimited mercy. Forgive me/us as you forgave the thief on the cross, Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus, My Lord, you who receive the repentant, forgive sinners, and rejoice in those who turn to you after going astray; purge me/us from all sins and cleanse me/us to offer praise and honour to you, your Father who for us sent you to this world and to the Holy Spirit.

THE DEDICATION SERVICE FOR THE FIRST COMMUNICANTS

(After the Nicene Creed, Offertory Hymn and offertory, during the Communion Service, the first communicants come forward and stand in line while a dedicational hymn is being sung)

Priest: Dearly beloved members of the congregation, we are assembled here to praise God as these first communicants openly confess that they are partakers in the saving grace of God. Let us pray that they may experience God's abundant power and Grace. We welcome them today to the full worship of the Church, the Body of Christ, through the sacrament of the Holy Qurbana.

To the Communicants: Are you ready to renew the pledge taken on behalf of you by your parents and godparents at the time of your Baptism?

The First Communicants: We are

Priest: Please repeat that pledge after me.

Communicants: I renounce Satan and believe in Christ.

I renounce Satan and believe in Christ.

I renounce Satan and believe in Christ.

Priest: Hear the Word of God. "But as many as receive him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit

will I put within you. You shall be my people and I will be your God.

Exhortation: By your baptism you have been received into the Church that is the body of Christ. You have come to renew the spiritual gift you received at the time of Baptism and to receive new gifts. Repeat this prayer and the acceptance of faith after me.

(To be repeated after the priest)

Lord God, you accepted me to the membership of the Church, the community of the new covenant through Baptism. I praise and thank you now for the great privilege of partaking in the Holy Qurbana.

I confess in your presence and in the presence of all assembled here that I have sinned against you and others, in thought, word and deed. I commit myself into your hands, trusting in your inestimable mercy. I sincerely desire to love you whole-heartedly and follow you.

I decide now to diligently learn the word of God and to regularly participate in the Holy Qurbana. Depending on the Grace of God, I would continue to strive for the establishment of peace and justice among all people and to respect the individuality and worth of all human beings.

Priest: You who are called to be the light of this world, be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Renounce the transient and deceitful lusts of fallen humanity. Hold on to the Word of God. May you enjoy the life through faith in Christ Jesus! May God strengthen you to keep these pledges. May you experience a life of peace on earth and heavenly joy at the right hand side of God, in the world to come!

Lord fill these children of yours with your Holy Spirit. Strengthen them for your service. Keep them ever under your loving care. May your loving hand be ever over them. Bring them in the knowledge and obedience of your word. May they serve you in this world and enjoy the inheritance of all saints in the world to come. Amen

The priest gives Bibles to the first communicants.

Either the whole congregation or one man and one woman from among them saying:

We, the members of this parish joyfully welcome you to the fellowship of the Church. We promise you our prayers and help. May the Lord help us to serve God in the unity of the Spirit. May God keep us from falling and enable us to stand pure and spotless with all the saints in His presence in His Eternal Kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Dearly beloved, go into the world in peace. May the God of peace be with you. May His Holy Spirit guide you. May the blessings of the Triune God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever, Amen.

Appendix

THE FAITH THAT SUSTAINS ME

In my view a Christian is one who experiences a close friendly relationship with Jesus. The man who experiences such a relationship will be the member of a community that has accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and experiences the fellowship with God through Christ. Such a man will have a special character. The nature of a Christian will have at least the following characteristics. (1) It will be a life free from the burden of sins. John Bunyan describes how the burden of sin rolled away while standing beneath the cross. (2) It will be a life which has triumphed over sin. That is the gift which Christ has given us. “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10) (3) With perfection this life will be joyful also – the joy that is experienced by rising above circumstances. Worldly joy depends on circumstances. Christian joy is that joy which Paul experienced even when he say in prison, bound to a soldier. (4) This life which has the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and the triumph over sin and which is full of joy is a life shared with others, who are invited to that life. Christian life is also above all this. Nobody can explain or define it. The above special characteristics will be there, whichever way it is described.

Now let us see the true principles of faith in which make us partakers in the perfection of life that Christ gave us. These truths as well as my convictions have helped me to experience this life.

One basic principle is that there is a God who is a perfect person and who is the creator and protector of this universe. It is no logic or intellectual facts that convinced me of this. I praise for the family which gave birth to me. As I grew up this awareness came into me. There are no arguments in the Bible to prove the existence of God. It was not for that purpose that this book was written. The Bible begins thus: "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth". (Genesis 1:1) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This verse speaks of Christ's pre-existence with God and in God.

I had to ask if this belief or assumption was logical. For many things happen in the world and in human life that question the existence of God who created this world and the human beings here. What shall we say about the mass murders in Vietnam and about the havoc caused by earthquakes in Peru? Is there a loving God? Is it God who created this earth and human beings? Isn't against reason to believe in God? Or all the arguments about the belief in the existence of God, it is the one based on the organic structure of the universe that has most appealed to me – the movement of the planets, the structure of the human body, the mutual reliance of the animal world and plant world and human beings themselves. I am thirsty and there is water to quench my thirst. Infants and adults long to be loved. There are parents and other dear ones to fulfill our longing for love. People have sexual desire; and there are those which can satisfy this urge. Human beings always long for someone whom they can adore and worship. They are beings interested in worship. Should I believe that there is no external reality which can satisfy this urge in me? No! I shouldn't. God who created this positive approach to the divine, this desire for an external reality beyond everything, is a personality; this personality satisfies my spiritual awareness. God does not appear at the end of an argument. He lives. He remains, not in dependence on our thoughts about him.

I have read the story of two astrologers. The subject of their study was the planets. One believed in God, the Creator of this universe. The other was an atheist who believed that the universe came into

existence in unknown ways. The one who believed in God made a general model of this universe, in it he gave the earth, the other planets and the stars their own place. Once the atheist friend came to his room and seeing this wonderful model, he asked his God-fearing friend who the creator of that model was. He answered that it came into being on its own. Then the atheist friend said: “No, it can’t be so. This was made by somebody”. Without believing in its wise director the order of the universe cannot be understood. The interest of the Bible is not in proving the existence of God but in describing step-by-step the revelation of God that became perfect in Christ. “God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoke unto us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” (Hebrews 1:1-4)

That God whom I worship is not just the Creator alone. He is my saviour also. The world in which I live tempts me to conform to it. The fleshly desires are strong. I want the assurance that I have a saviour – the assurance about God who accepts and protects me and keeps me from conforming to the world.

God is the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This affirmation gives me strength and solace. I consider Abraham and Isaac as tribal fathers who are entirely different from us. But Jacob was a man of failures like us. God is the father of the treacherous Jacob also we have hope. He will accept us. He will teach us to pursue him even through adversities. Again God who created me and who protects me must be my guide in my daily life. We live in a world, full of temptations. Those in power and authority are up and ready to mislead us. The writer of a lyric says: “I need you; I need you every hour.” Yes, we need God’s infinite power and help.

I found this need in the teaching about Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Is there anything more contradictory than this Christian concept Trinity. Three but one: One but Three. No human being can make this statement, after a debate and dialogue about the nature of God. The Apostles did not hold meetings to define the nature of God. They were Jews who were strictly religious and believed in One Single God. They saw God in Jesus Christ. They experienced God only in him. “he that has seen me has the Father; ... Believe you not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? (John 14:9, 10) These words became real only after they received the Holy Spirit. The disciples believed that Jesus Christ sat on the right side of his father in heaven. Yet from experience they learned that he was with them and that he led them. The words of Christ in the upper room became real to them. “If you love me, keep my commandments and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Peace I leave with you., my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid. You have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If you love me, you would rejoice because I said, I go unto the father; for my Father is greater than I”

Is the concept of Trinity against reason? Don't we also have a trinity nature? Take the human body for example. I see a trinity in me First of all the body. It moves; it works and finally it dies and decays. I have hand to write. Secondly the mind: it helps me think, read, understand, discuss and express my views in words and actions. Thirdly the spirit. It urges me to see the sunset, to watch the night sky and to find the Glory of God in the splendour of the sunset and the twinkle of the stars. During the time of Church worship I face the congregation and speak about the Word of God. When I turn to Holy Communion I have the vision of Christ's presence behind the principles of the bread and wine. That is: there is the principle of Trinity in me: body mind and spirit. Therefore the Trinity in oneness is not an illogical principle that we inherited from the Apostles.

Secondly I believe in Christ, not only as my Lord and Saviour but also as perfect God and perfect Man. These ideas entered my mind from my family; Sunday school, from prayers and from the speech I have heard. I could accept them without much thinking. But the study of the New Testament strengthened these beliefs in me. "I am in the Father, and the Father in me; ..; I am the way, truth and life."

The man who said all this about himself must be divine or he must be a fraud. Only he who is God alone can save me from sin. Someone who has experienced the weaknesses and temptations of a human being alone will have the knowledge and empathy to save me. Therefore a divine being is needed for my redemption. For the assurance of redemption it is necessary to believe in the humanity and divinity of Christ. The problem for the early Church was how Jesus was perfect God. For us it is how the Redeemer Christ was a real human being. It is a doctrine which is difficult to be grasped by human intelligence. But this is something which can be completely understood through experience.

I believe that Christ will come as Judge. I think that the Nicene Creed is a total statement of the fundamental beliefs of the Church. It says that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We speak of Christ's Second Coming. This phrase may not have a place in the Creed. Yet it has become very familiar through sermons and speeches. Someone may ask: Isn't Christ present with us here and now? Or is he sitting on the right side of God. This statement in the Bible and the Nicene Creed does not describe the presence in any particular position. On the other hand it figuratively describes Christ's eternal presence with the Father, as our intercessor. How can we speak of Christ's coming if he is with us?

Some people are of the opinion that Christ came on the day of the Pentecost. Aren't the presence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit the presence of Christ himself? It is definitely so, we are convinced of Christ's presence through several contexts and purposes of life. When we mourn our dear ones Christ is present as our solace and strength. He comes when temptations confront us, to lead us in our struggle and

to strengthen us. When we are in doubt about the path we are to choose and we go deep in prayers. Christ comes to show us the path. When we participate in the Holy Communion Service, Christ is present to give himself to us, as he promised, through bread and wine. We see that in different situations his presence is also different. He presents himself in a different way in different contexts. It is a Christian belief that at the end of the present system we shall know him as a judge. He will judge us according to our good and evil actions. The idea of a judgement that is to come is necessary in our life as a corrective and chastening means as well as something that makes us aware of our responsibility for our actions.

I believe in the ultimate triumph of goodness as this world is the creation of God and Christ was sent to redeem it. The world is filled with light and darkness. Here is conflict between good and evil, light and darkness. It is not as the Zoroastrians claim a conflict between two eternal realities. Goodness is the eternal and ultimate reality. Evil just entered the world. It is only momentary and relative. But there need not be any fear about the ultimate result. Good Friday is a reality. But the day of Resurrection is its conclusion. If we die with Christ in sin, we become his partners in Resurrection. We are not like those who glide along the sea and finally melt in it like a glacier. We travel with Christ seeing a definite goal in front. At the end of the path there is a kingdom that is fulfilled. Even as we are Christ's fellow travelers, we become the members of his kingdom, which is perfected in the days to come.

I believe in Church Militant and Church Triumphant. Every Christian must grasp the concepts about the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. In the eyes of God the Church is just one unity. It includes the living and dead. Of all the religions in the world, Christianity alone believes in and waits for a community that includes the living and the dead. Death works out some change in human beings alone. Death does not cut off the believer's relationship with God. He/She begins to experience this relationship even as he/she is on this earth. We are the members of the Church that fights against a fighting world

and its temptations. However imperfect our community of believers is, it remains as an organization in the discipline of the Church. It is the triumphant Church we have no perfect knowledge about its discipline and real life. It is an area under the direct rule of Jesus Christ. Savonarola, was a saint and scholar in the Roman Catholic Church. He maintained ideas about reformation and was progressive in thought. He did not conform to the conservative views of the recognized Church. So he was ex-communicated. The order of ex-communication was somewhat like this: "I banish you from the Church Militant and Church Triumphant. Savonarola replied thus: Yes, from the Militant Church that's right. But from the Triumphant Church? No! That is not within your jurisdiction!!" As far as God's presence is concerned, we must be strongly convinced of our unity with the dead. Both are in the presence and protection of God, along with the saints. The communion with saints which is mentioned in the Nicene Creed speaks of this. Some are apprehensive about this expression. They feel that it leads to prayers for the dead and prayers to the saints. It is not so. We affirm this idea in a statement about the order of worship. It is written: "The Heavenly hosts bow before him. The sun, the moon and the stars, the animate and the inanimate, the angels, those whose names are marked in Heaven powers. Thrones, Cherubs, Seraphs all sing aloud that God is Holy. Let us also worship Him." The idea here is that all creation worships Him.

Lastly I believe that after death we enter into a closer presence of Christ. Everybody would like to know what happens during the time and after death. The wish to converse with the dead is as old as the time of Samuel and Saul. There are some modern scientific men who make money out of this business. In the 1970 June 6 issue of the *Blessed* weekly we have the printed form of the tape-recorded conversation with a spirit.

On 18 December 1958 there came the lyric-writer Choppin. The tape-recorder said: "Greetings!"

"Will you please tell us about yourself?" said Mrs. Greany.

“I remember lying bed-ridden because of some mortal disease. Gradually everything seemed to be moving away from me. In the end everything became quiet.”

I saw light

I stopped hearing sounds. I lost the sense and consciousness about everything. I felt like reeling round. I moved away from everything. Nothing seemed real thereafter.

Then I started seeing light. First it was seen as something that shone dimly. Then it began to grow brighter. Sounds began to be heard. It was music.

It increased in tempo. It began to sound high. It seemed that there was a big orchestra. I tried to recognize the scene.

It seemed that it had some topic that attracted me. But I couldn't recognize it. It was not a music that was familiar to me. It was greater than all that I had heard.

Choppin continued to talk about a beautiful building. It was full of people who surrounded him in love and fellowship.

Then he saw a noble human figure who wore golden and purple dress.

What is given here is a good description of death and what comes after death. There need not be such a voice from the world of spirits to know so much about death. At the time of death there may be the experience of moving away from things familiar to us till then. Then we may come to be convinced of a new life-scene of light and joy. I gave the above description not because I believe in any need or possibility of conversing with the dead (What is said here seems to reflect the mind and thoughts of the person who ask the questions). I quoted it because it agrees with my imagination about death experience. It is a picture of withdrawing from one scene and awakening in another.

I have already said that I am not much interested in the thoughts about heaven and earth. Our life and actions on this earth must not be guided by the thought of the reward or punishment in the life to come. My concern is not about the heat in hell or the facilities in heaven. It

is about what human beings do here, on this earth". (Martin Luther King) Yet one cannot help thinking about the state after death. It has already been said that St. Paul has taken two views about death in his epistles. One is that it is a state of sleep. The second is that it is a life with Christ. I accept the second, more mature view of Paul. Our conviction about the life to come is based on our belief that God is love. God who is loving will not let the objects of his affection to be away from His fellowship for a short or a long while. At the time of death we enter a new arena of life. The details of it are unknown to us. There are some children of God who have faced death with hope and courage. While Rev. Koor Ipe Thomas was passing through the last stage of his life, some of the people who came to see him felt very sad. It is said that he told them after his usual manner. "Why? I am being transferred on promotion. So, why are you crying?" Yes! Transfer on promotion! That is the view of death that we must accept. But human as we are, death cannot but be painful and frightening for us. The verses of a famous lyric seem to explain the Biblical belief.

Peace, Complete Peace!

Does death bring us and all that we have under dark shadows?
Jesus has conquered death and all its might'.

'Content are we for

The struggles of life are soon to end

Jesus invites us to Heaven's Peace Complete Peace'.

Theologians hold two different views about the human soul, its existence and the end of the world. One is the teaching about Universal Salvation, according to which all created beings will be saved. We are the children of God. Every individual is dear to him. Christ died for everyone of us. As God does not want any one of his dear ones to be lost; everybody will be ultimately saved. Our souls, after death, will be purified from sin and will get a chance or come to stage to be blessed for heaven. The loss of a soul will be a defeat for God. God's purposes cannot fail. Therefore all souls will be saved. This is the line of thought of the doctrine of Universal Salvation.

The other view is that of conditional salvation. According to this eternal life is not an inherent claim or attribute. As some of the verses we quoted earlier say, eternal life is a gift. A few other verses may also be quoted here: “A I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand”. (John 10:28) “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). This is the belief on which I rely. The soul that commits sin will die. Jesus said that he was going and that his disciples would seek him; The soul that sins may not be eternally tormented in hell but its existence will end. The righteous will attain eternal life. This is in accordance with Biblical teaching.

I believe in the result of prayer. For me the general definition of prayer is this prayer is the profound yearning of the heart, uttered or unuttered. Real prayer is not the words that we utter. It is the desire and purpose that spring from the depth of our hearts. All people pray. Even atheists make known to others some desires of their hearts. But real prayer is possible only for those who believe in a personified God. This is why inspite of its great Advaita doctrine, Hinduism has permitted idol worship. Human beings demand a person as an idol of worship. Here it is the belief in Jesus Christ that makes prayer real Jesus Christ who is God can save me from sin and help me lift my heart to God. I have the courage to approach God because Jesus Christ has tasted human life and knows its weaknesses and needs. He can fully empathise with me. Prayer-life is expressed in three ways. (1) Personal prayer and Bible study (2) Family prayer and prayers in small groups; (3) Public worship. If any one of these is affected, our relationship with God, which is the very essence of Christian life, will be in danger. It is a sad fact that in many modern families personal prayer and family prayer are neglected. That is the cause of the materialistic outlook and many social evils. I am not a man of prayer in the eyes of many people, because neither prolonged prayer nor emotionally touching prayer in public places is familiar to me. There are many who consider public prayers soft. If I lead a prayer after a touching speech during a convention, people say ‘praise’ in response

to my first sentences and keep quiet as I continue prayers accompanied by such encouraging sounds are unfamiliar to me. I lift myself to God's presence in silent prayer even when I work, or travel or am in the company of others. This prayer strengthens me and helps me to be convinced of God's presence. As I come to this, I remember a lesson for meditation from the book "Streams in the Desert."

It is a real incident about an old man. Everyday at 12 noon he would enter a Church spend sometime and then leave. The watchman of the Church became suspicious of him. He saw to it that the man who came so regularly got no chance to steal any of the costly things kept in the altar, One day the watchman entered into a conversation with him.

"Look, friend, what is it that you do here when you come everyday?"

"I come to pray."

The keenly observing watchman said: OK, but you take such a little time for prayer!

"That's right. It is impossible for me to pray for a long time. All that I say when I come here is: "Jesus, this is Jim." Then I wait for a moment and leave. But I suppose he hears it, even though it is a small prayer.

One day Jim broke his leg as he was crossing a road. He was in hospital. The ward in which he lay, was a problem ward for the nurses. Most of the patients were in pain and were always miserable and grumbling. But Jim was ever cheerful and he spread that cheer in the ward and the faces of other patients also reflected joy.

One day a nurse heard them laughing and she asked them: "What has happened? You have become cheerful these days."

"It's old Jim! He suffers a lot yet never complains and is always happy."

The nurse went to Jim's bedside. There lay Jim, resembling an angel in his appearance; his hair all silvery. The nurse said:

“Well, Jim, these people say that you are responsible for the change in them. You are always happy.”

“That’s true, sister. I am very happy. I can’t help it. It’s my guest who makes me happy.”

“Guest?” The nurse was surprised; never had she seen a guest beside Jim’s bed. The chair there remained vacant during visiting hours.

Jim’s eyes grew brighter. He said: “Everyday he comes at 12! I see him and he smiles and says “Jim, this is Jesus.”

(It is a real incident that took place in England and Mrs. Charles Cowman has described it in the second volume of her book “Streams in the Desert”.)

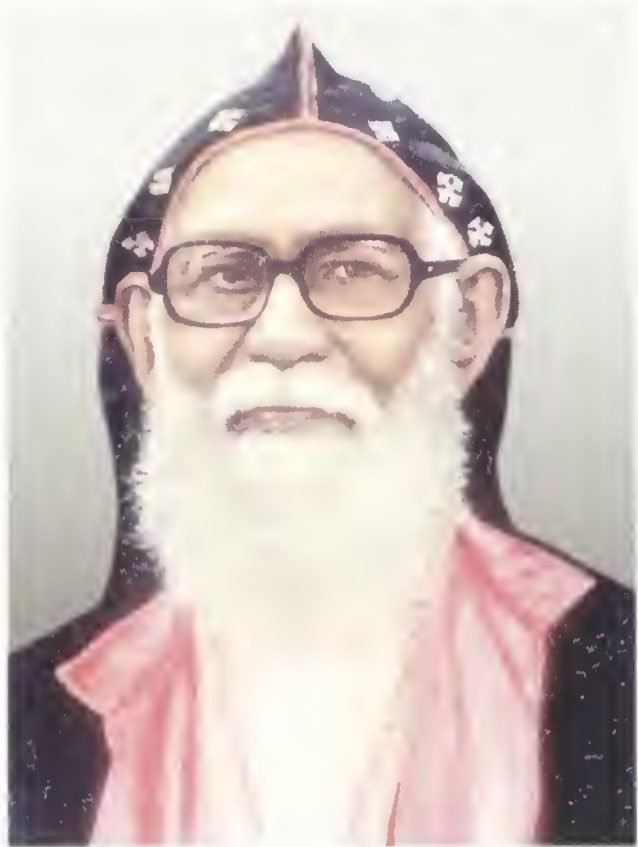
I am also aware of my failures because I don’t pray aloud and with emotional appeal. As my prayer life at one level is very dry in big or small gatherings, the power of my testimony has not been great. But I am convinced that in moments of crisis in my life and work it is the prayer of the Church and individuals, that has sustained me. I can understand the power of the arms that help me. It is necessary for us to pray for others. Intercessory prayers must have a very important place in our life. Through it we, unknowingly, help others. It’s great service to help others in their journey of life.

I have already said that I am not satisfied with the solace and prayers I offer for the bereaved. As I studied more about the state after death, I am able to give a more consoling message to them. I pray thus:

“Dear Lord the dear ones who have left us from our midst, are beyond our eyes and service. As we come to you in prayer make us aware of their presence also with you. You who meet our needs can meet their needs also. At the end of our lives we too have to bid farewell to our dear ones here and to join them who wait for us in the world above. May this faith and hope comfort us and strengthen us for our activities.”

This prayer gives us the strength for the life in this world and the hope for the life to come. There are many portions from the scripture

and hymns and lyrics that have helped to develop such a faith in me. I often remember this verse: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27). This verse I found in my college days on the walls of the room of His Grace Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan, has deeply impressed and strengthened me.



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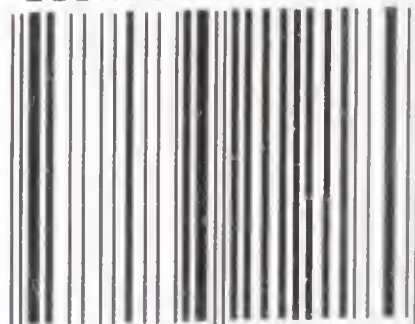
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